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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001214

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND DS/IP/NEA
LONDON FOR ETHAN GOLDRICH
DEPARTMENT PASS TO USTR: JBUNTIN

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER ETRD BA KSEC
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER COMMITTED TO NATIONAL SECURITY

REF: MANAMA 1120

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and select members of his Cabinet stressed to Charge that security is Bahrain's utmost priority and that consequently Bahrain will remain at a heightened state of vigilance. PM stressed that full cooperation and sharing of information are the keys to the continued success of the long-standing relationship between the US and Bahrain. The PM expressed dismay at the Navy's sudden decision to evacuate its dependents citing a failure in sharing information. Minister of Interior Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa said that the GOB is working to establish a counter-terrorism center that will help solve information sharing and action coordination within the GOB. Stressing Bahrain's commitment to national and regional security, the PM said that the Cabinet drafted a counter-terrorism law he expects the National Assembly to approve in October. Charge welcomed GOB's latest efforts in combating terrorism and said the GOB must demonstrate the political will to fight terrorism and send a strong signal to any elements that would undertake actions threatening Bahrain's security. Charge lauded progress on the counter-terrorism law and noted that many parties concerned with Bahrain's security will be following the judicial proceedings of the case against the six terror suspects (see reftel). END SUMMARY.

NAVY DEPENDENTS

¶12. (C) Welcoming the Charge to Bahrain, on July 31, the Prime Minister quickly moved through pleasantries and steered the discussion to the issue of national security. The PM noted that the relationship between our two countries has been one of full cooperation and sharing of information. The PM expressed his disappointment about the Navy's sudden decision to evacuate its dependents. The PM assured Charge that the GOB is doing everything in its power to keep Bahrain secure and stable and stated his hope that the Navy's dependents return to Bahrain soon.

GOB's COMMITMENT TO SECURITY

¶13. (C) The following ministers whose portfolios include security issues were also present at the meeting: Minister of Interior Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa and Undersecretary for Immigration and Passport Affairs Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa. Minister of Finance and National Economy Abdulla Saif and HH Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa bin Shaikh Al Khalifa of the PM's Court (the PM's son) also attended. U/S Rashid informed Charge that the Saudi causeway, all naval ports and Muharraq airport are currently on heightened alert. Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid stated that the Cabinet has finalized a draft counter-terrorism law. Minister Saif offered that the Cabinet is working on the formation of a counter-terrorism center that will allow rapid information sharing among ministries and departments in the GOB and with its allies.

¶14. (C) The Charge welcomed the GOB's latest security measures. Charge said it is important that Bahrain's leadership signals it has zero tolerance for any elements that seek to destabilize security in Bahrain and has the political will to do something about it. The PM acknowledged that the regional security environment has worsened during the past year. He said that Bahrain does not exist in isolation and is not immune to terrorism in the region. The PM likened the situation to "a boat sailing upriver makes waves that hit both shores." The PM emphasized that Bahrain is responding to security concerns with a high level of vigilance, which he asserted, has become Bahrain's new norm.

¶15. (C) The PM said that having the Navy and the Embassy on prolonged alert damages Bahrain's reputation as a favorable place to visit and conduct business. Minister Saif expressed concern that prolonged alert status might affect the roll-out

of the Free Trade Agreement. Charge stressed that a signal of a strong security environment underpinned by rule of law was the best mechanism to encourage foreign direct investment.

¶ 16. (C) In a separate meeting, on August 1, Charge met with the Minister of Cabinet Affairs Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al Mutawwa. Al Mutawwa stated that in the current security environment, no one is immune to terrorism, including Bahrain. He assured Charge that the GOB is taking preemptive rather than reactive measures to fight terrorism. He confirmed that the draft counter-terrorism law passed Cabinet review and would address legal requirements to combat terrorism that Bahrain's criminal code may not cover. At the Charge's request, Al Mutawwa agreed to forward a copy of the draft law to Charge.

¶ 17. (C) In closing, Al Mutawwa inquired about the status of the Bahrain School. (One of his sons is scheduled to attend in the Fall.) Al Mutawwa asserted that the Bahrain School has been an anchor of our long-standing bilateral relationship. The school's academic excellence has prepared many Bahrainis for higher education in the US. Charge informed Al Mutawwa that the situation is being discussed in Washington, DC and hopes that a decision will be made soon.

¶ 18. (C) COMMENT. The PM signaled by the selection of ministers included in the meeting that his assurances on security will be carried out. In stressing the link between national security and economic development, the PM underlined a key motivation driving him to ensure that Bahrain is safe and secure. END COMMENT.

ZIADEH